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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001889

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/RA BITTRICK  
NSC FOR MCLEAN

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TAGS: PREL MARR NI MAS

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ARMY CHIEF BRIEFED ON OFR

REF: USDAO ABUJA IIR 6 871 0381 01

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On July 23, 3rd Group Battalion Commander LTC Tim Sherwood briefed Chief of Army Staff, MG Alexander Ogomudia, on Operation Focus Relief Phase III (OFR P3). Initially taciturn, Ogomudia quickly turned receptive and largely positive. During the briefing on basing, Ogomudia reminded his staff that he had instructed that the 20 Battalion Serti could not participate in OFR P3. However, after being told that it would be extremely difficult to change course now that base construction had begun, Ogomudia relented. Clearly with a mind to the border with Cameroon, he told his staff that another battalion might have to be sent to Serti after the 20 Battalion deployed. Ogomudia's staff raised questions on human rights vetting, the scale of equipment in OFR and the radios being provided.

¶12. (C) After the briefing, a relaxed and friendly Ogomudia received the team in his private office. He suggested that a Nigerian Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) team attend training at the three sites. He also thought a visit to Sierra Leone by a U.S. Special Forces representative and a Nigerian Officer might be useful to evaluate the training from Phase I. (See Reftel for USDAO reporting on the same subject.) END SUMMARY.

¶13. (U) On July 23, an OFR team composed of the 3rd Group Battalion Commander LTC Tim Sherwood, 30th Medical Brigade Commander Colonel Lamez Schoomaker, Major Marc Wisecarver, Acting Defense Attaché Cass and PolMilOff, met with Chief of Army Staff (COAS), MG Alexander Ogomudia. Ogomudia was accompanied by several staff officers.

¶14. (C) After the 10-minute briefing by LTC Sherwood which included a summary of the POI, and which MG Ogomudia voiced no objection to the POI, MG Ogomudia turned to his staff and reminded them that he had instructed that the 20 Battalion Serti could not participate in OFR P3 because of concerns about the state of relations with "a neighbor." He asked why we were proceeding with construction in Serti. Major Cass exclaimed that we had not been made aware of his decision. His staff, clearly at a loss to explain the situation, was silent. LTC Sherwood noted that base construction had been underway for some weeks, and it would be extremely difficult to change course now. Ogomudia relented, but told his Chief of Operations that, while the 20 Battalion could participate, another battalion might have to be sent to Serti after 20 Battalion deployed.

¶15. (C) The General Staff asked about the radios the battalions would receive, noting that they preferred PRC-117 radios over the Motorola radios issued during OFR, Phase 1. The major complaint was communications security. However, one of the General Staff noted that this had been resolved by the UN through issuance of particular frequencies to each UNAMSIL contingent. The General Staff also asked about the scale of equipment, noting a disparity between OFR assistance and UN scale. In particular, they requested APCs vice Toyota Hi-Lux 4x4s. The ADATT responded that concerns such as these could be raised with Washington, but that OFR was based on a limited budget, and it was very unlikely at this point that the equipment list could be adjusted.

¶16. (C) The ADATT then took the opportunity to raise the 22 vehicles from Phase I that had yet to be shipped to Sierra Leone. MG Ogomudia gave a thumbs-up, and said that he had spoken that morning with the PermSec at the Ministry of

Defense as well as the MOD Chief of Logistics. He noted that shipping might have to be arranged at the Defense Headquarters level (read Chief of Defense Staff), but said, "It's my soldiers in the rain without tents." He then noted that either by commercial means, Air Force lift, or "another route," the vehicles would be shipped.

17. (C) Human rights vetting was then discussed. The Generals suggested that the U.S. simply provide a list of those who could not be trained because of their past behavior, and they would not include them. They added that they did not want a soldier to be accused wrongly. Major Cass explained that vetting was a legal requirement of the United States, and was done with any country that received security assistance training. PolMilOff explained the process further, noted that there had not been any soldiers excluded during Phase I, and assured the General Staff that if a name raised any flags, the issue would be dealt with privately between the Embassy and the Chief of Army Staff to avoid any false accusations. However, the process was the law, was important, and would have to be observed.

18. (C) LTC Sherwood asked the COAS if he would approve an Airborne friendship jump. Ogomudia at first misunderstood, and explained that Nigeria had suspended Airborne training due to decrepit facilities. He noted that if the U.S. wanted to assist Nigeria with funding to repair the facilities, that would be appreciated (but noted that Airborne was not his priority). After clarification, Ogomudia heartily approved the idea of a friendship jump.

19. (C) After the briefing, MG Ogomudia received the team in private. The Army Chief was relaxed and friendly. He suggested that a Nigerian TRADOC team attend training at the three sites to provide feedback to him and the U.S. team. He also suggested that a visit to Sierra Leone by a U.S. Special Forces representative and a TRADOC Officer might be useful to evaluate the results of training from Phase I on the ground.

110. (C) COMMENT: Several members of the U.S. team were stunned when the COAS said he had disapproved training for the 20 Battalion Serti. From his comments and his tight facial expression, it was clear that he was very concerned about the situation on the border with Cameroon. Fortunately, Ogomudia showed the flexibility needed for training to continue.

111. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: General Ogomudia, while initially taciturn, became warm and friendly over the course of the meeting. At one point, he asked his staff if they had any other questions. When they were silent, he prompted them with a smile by reminding them that, "You are on the receiving end. Mine is just to give the orders." While Embassy had grown accustomed to new road-blocks being introduced in the security assistance relationship (POI, equipment, deployment), a new era of joint-problem solving seems to have arrived.

112. (C) DAO COMMENT: We view the COAS's silence following the POI brief as giving the POI a nod. END DAO COMMENT.  
Jeter